

#Mondaymotivation: Lieze Thielemans (Class of 2014)



Alumna Lieze Thielemans is currently in her fourth year studying medicine at Imperial College London. She gives us an insight into what medical school really involves.

What have you done since leaving Putney?

I went to study medicine at Imperial College London.

Did you always know you wanted to study medicine?

Medicine is a career choice you pretty much choose when you're 16, making sure that you've picked Chemistry and Biology as two of your A-levels. I don't really know when exactly I decided that I wanted to pursue medicine as a career, it just always seemed the right option for me.

What has your University career been like so far?

I have recently completed an intercalated BSc in Cardiovascular Sciences. Alongside my studies I have volunteered with St John's Ambulance, teaching first aid to primary school children, as well as continuing with some of the

extra-curricular activities I did at Putney, like orchestra and musical theatre. There is no average day in medicine, the course changes so much depending which year you are in. My first and second year were predominately lecture based and my third, fifth and sixth years will have a strong focus on clinical placements. This year after my lectures finished and the inevitable exams were over I had a 10-week research project to complete!

Tell us a bit more about your research project.

I ended up splitting my project into two. The first half I worked with Professor Shovlin at Hammersmith Hospital to conduct clinical research aimed at improving treatment in patients with Hereditary Haemorrhagic Telangiectasia (HHT - a rare genetic disorder that leads to abnormal blood vessel formation in the skin, and often in organs such as the lungs, liver, and brain). The second half of my project was spent at the Leiden University Medical Centre in The Netherlands.

What work did you get to do in The Netherlands?

I was privileged enough to complete a voluntary internship with pioneers in the field of data management. For a month I worked to improve the machine's ability to read collected data by applying the process of FAIRification to a patient registry.

What is FAIRification?

The FAIR principles are a relatively new concept, designed to enhance data reusability. Data collection consumes a significant proportion of researchers' time, and would be vastly reduced if elements of previously collected data sets could be found and reused. In order for this to be possible, data should be findable, accessible, interoperable and reusable; FAIR.

As the development of FAIR is a novel concept, I have been invited to present my work at the 2018 international meeting of the HHT working group, part of VASCERN – a European Reference Network dedicated to improving the care and management of patients with rare vascular diseases.

What advice would you give to anyone thinking about studying medicine?

Once Sixth Form starts, and before UCAS begins, anyone who wants to go to medical school has to do work experience, preferably in a hospital or a GP setting. Universities want to see that you have a realistic view of what medicine entails, and understand that, unfortunately, it is not just about saving lives. They also know that it is notoriously difficult to get any sort of medical work experience, so I would advise making use of any family or friends with a link to the healthcare profession! The NHS is going through a rough time but I still believe it is an incredible institution to work for – one that ensures free healthcare access to all.

What advice would you give to pupils and alumnae going to University?

If an opportunity is presented to you, take it! It may not be in your specific field of interest but it will open up a whole world of experiences and networks. And lastly, work with each other, support each other. Medicine is competitive and you will only make it with support from your friends and colleagues.